2:Seligman & Seligman E-5 (1909-1910) 1932
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and habitat. The spirits of the bush are we believe in the main unimportant, but the river people and their river cattle play a more considerable part in the mythology of the people. One of the groups of people whom Nyakang found in the land were fish-men, or river-men with the power of turning into fish, while the mysterious cows whose dung provided the "ashes of denying" (p. 102) had their original home in the river.

It is convenient to consider the cult of the dead Shilluk kings apart from that of Nyakang at his cenotaph shrines, but it must be remembered that in every king there is immanent the spirit of Nyakang, so that the worship rendered them at their grave shrines is ultimately only part of the cult of Nyakang.

Like the cenotaph shrines of Nyakang the royal grave shrines are called *kwgo*, as opposed to the graves of commoners for which the word is *rwo*.[1] Though smaller, they resemble the shrines of Nyakang in appearance, for the roofs of their constituent huts terminate in ostrich egg and spear-head. The guardians or priests (*kwoth*) of these shrines are of the same class as those of the *kwgo Nyakang*, viz. elderly women, often widows of the dead king, and old men, his former servants, or their descendants who have reached the requisite age, or, as a last resource when none of these can be found, old women or old men not specially connected with the dead king. Just as no one except the *kwoth Nyakang* is allowed to enter the shrines of Nyakang, so no stranger may enter the royal grave shrines. A royal daughter never becomes a guardian of a shrine, but she may enter the grave shrine of her dead father and rub her hands on its floor for a blessing whenever she likes, as may the royal sisters. It seemed that these privileges did not extend to the shrines of other dead kings, nor even to the enclosed space around them. Should the spirit of a dead king appear to a royal daughter or sister in a dream and demand an offering, she would take a sheep to the guardians of the tomb and give it to one of them to sacrifice in the same way as a commoner. There are cattle belonging to the grave shrines of the kings, and offerings are made as at the shrines of Nyakang. Thus, when the millet crop threatens to fail, or epidemic sickness to attack the cattle, Nyakang or one of his successors will appear to someone in a dream and demand a sacrifice. This is told to the king, who will immediately send a cow and a bullock to one or more of the shrines

[1] See Index for uses of "dho", "rwo", "go away", and in addressing the king a special secret language is employed.

2:Seligman & Seligman E-5 (1909-1910) 1932
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already referred to *pen Juok* (p. 75), the country of the dead, to be reached after long wandering in the bush, but there is also a chthonic element in Shilluk ancestor worship; the spirit persists in or round the grave and may harm its living relatives, e.g. the death of a missionary's wife shortly after that of her husband was attributed to the ghost of the latter, while Hofmayr quotes a remark of the chief Yangjok to the effect that evil comes on man from below.[1] Again, the Shilluk undoubtedly fear the *cen*, the malevolent element that persists after the death of one who has died in hatred of friends or relatives, though here again the belief does not seem to bulk as largely as among the Acholi.

Offerings and sacrifice may be made to ancestors, but in our limited experience we have met with no instance that could certainly be dissociated from the cult of the royal ancestors or in which the ancestral spirits were not confused with or associated with Juok. It is true that Hofmayr describes offerings to ancestors[2] but his descriptions, taken for the most part from notes of colleagues, are not very convincing, as there is nothing to show that the cult of Nyakang or his descendants was specifically excluded. On the other hand he cites two short chants[3] which may be regarded as evidence of prayer to the ancestors:—

*ure kwajo mayagwa*
"The people entreat their mothers (ancestors)."
*ure kwajo ningwa*
"The people entreat their people (their dead)."

A hæmorrhage followed by sudden death is called "the spears of the dead", i.e. the victim has been stabbed by a ghostly weapon, but the Shilluk expression, *nang tiang pa Juok*, seems to bring Juok into the matter. A more definite relation to ancestral spirits is seen in a note by Bainbridge, quoted by Hofmayr,[4] to the effect that warriors obtained the services of an *ajuago* to invoke their ancestors, that the spirits of the slain may be harmless. A sheep is killed and part of the viscera placed in a pot and buried as an offering to those in the underworld.[5]

[1] Op. cit., 130. [2] Op. cit., 109. [3] Op. cit., 130. [4] Loc. cit.
[5] Oyler records that many Shilluk "take an offering of the first fruits to the grave of an ancestor, usually the father. . . . The grain is made into a sort of bannock and poured out on the grave. The men then says that he has given his father a name." ("Dhiang's place in the Shilluk Religion": *J.R.A.S.*, i. (1918), 266). But in another passage Oyler clearly shows an identification of the ancestral spirits with Juok (for we assume that "God" is a translation of "Juok"): ". . . When prayer is to be offered to the spirit of a dead person, a female sheep is brought to the grave. If the person making the prayer is not the son of the

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769 Mr. Heasty, whom we consulted, holds that there is little difference
718 between the worship of ancestors, and that of former kings. A suppliant would visit a royal shrine if there happened to be one near, and might afterwards resort to the grave of an ancestor. If no royal shrine were near he would immediately resort to an ancestor shrine, brushing away sticks, dirt, etc., with his hands, and offer a prayer to the ancestor. When for sickness a sheep is offered at the grave of an ancestor, an ear is severed, indicating that the sheep belongs to that ancestor and is ever afterwards sacred. Such sacred animals are handed over to some aged attendant of the shrine; their milk is never mixed with the milk of other animals, but is kept for the small children and the very aged, who come to the attendant's home to drink. The animals are never sold, and for each as it gets old one of its offspring is substituted. Such prayer and sacrifice may be offered in any serious difficulty, in sickness, before a perilous journey, or when greatly perplexed in any matter.

782 Human sacrifice was always rare among the Shilluk, but it undoubtedly occurred. There is a legend, likely we think to be truthful, that the shrine at Fenikang was originally erected with human sacrifice, and the idea exists that each time this shrine is rebuilt someone will die. We have already referred to the ceremonial and fatal trampling underfoot of an old man (p. 91), by the king-elect and the people, and to the ceremonial drowning of a man and
782 woman (p. 91). But besides these ceremonies more or less secret
785 sacrifices might take place as a last resort to obtain rain—the usual
[84] prayers and offerings having failed—and for success in war. According to Hofmayr, who gives texts with literal translations,

[534] [illegible] "While there is no set form for the prayer . . . yet they are all very similar, and the following is an example:—

"We praise you, you, who are God, it was you, who gave me my father, who begot me. I pray to you also my father. Why did you go to the earth and keep silence? Why was this your human habitat? When evil comes to your house, why do you not pray to God? Your house is given as a plaything to the people. You went to the presence of God, and we thought that nothing evil would befall us again, after you left. Now hello, God. Why do you leave the responsibility of saving on God alone? God's spirit becomes tired (feels weak), and he leaves people and they die. Why do you not see and save us? You went to the ground, and you have forgotten that a person from another human does not guard yours." (Op. cit., 180-3.)

made at all times of stress and misfortune. Everything round a shrine is sacred, especially trees - they are particularly rare in Shillukland in any case.

Certain Shilluk kings, particular incarnations of Nyikang, tend to be identified with particular species of animals. If such an animal approaches the shrine without signs of fear, it is assumed to be the form in which Nyikang appears, and a sacrifice is offered at the shrine. Almost any unusual behaviour on the part of an animal would lead the Shilluk to look on it as a temporary incarnation of Nyikang. Nyikang's mother, Nikaive, is reputed to have been a crocodile and is believed to live in the river in that form. A sacrifice is made to her by throwing a live sheep into the river. The crocodile is generally spared even though these creatures are a danger in river crossings.

There is a limited cult of the Dinka spirit Dengait, and also a belief in the spirits of the bush and river.

THE CULT OF THE ANCESTORS

Beliefs concerning the ancestral spirits are vague. Reference is made to *pun jwok*, 'the country of the dead', which is reached by the spirit after long wandering through the bush, but it is also believed that the spirit persists in or around the grave. Offerings and sacrifices are made to the ancestral spirits by the head of a household or local lineage on behalf of the descendants. If there is sickness or misfortune or the possibility of danger, a person will pray to his ancestors and make an animal sacrifice to propitiate them.

The ancestral cult seems, however, to be overshadowed by the national cult of Nyikang and the royal ancestors.

TOTEMIC BELIEFS

Seligman suggests that Shilluk totemism may have been derived from the Dinka because it seems so slight and unimportant. According to Hofmayr and Westermann the clans appear to have totems and some clans derive themselves from an animal or fish which Nyikang took and turned into people in order to populate the country. Hofmayr states that totem animals are often killed but it is considered wrong to eat them.(1) Most totems are animals but a few are plants. Children inherit their totems from their fathers; a woman keeps hers even when she is married.(2)

MAGICAL PRACTICES

The Rainmaker (*Ajwogo*)

*Ajwogo* means 'man of luck'. Such people are regarded as possessing certain magical powers which they use for the good of the community. People go to them when they are in need of help and pay them for their assistance. The powers of the *ajwogo* are believed to be due to their

(1) Hofmayr, *Die Schilluk*, 1925, p.210.
(2) *Ibid.*

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# NIKAWNG'S PLACE
## IN THE SHILLUK RELIGION

BY REV. D. S. OYLER.

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The Shilluks being without a written language have lacked the means to collect and verify their religious beliefs. When asked as to their beliefs they refer to the old men, who have given them the traditions. Defects of memory, different sources of information, and the personal beliefs, and desires of the narrator, tend to give a diversity of belief.

The Shilluks profess belief in a Supreme Being. He is greater than Nikawng or any other king. He is the Creator of the world, but he is far distant. They are not able to come into close contact with him, and feeling that he is far beyond their reach, and dismayed by the disasters, which come to them apparently from the hand of God, they feel the need of some one to stand between them and God. Nikawng is the chief intermediary, though others stand between them and God, either for good or evil. The distance of the Creator, and the nearness of the intercessor often tends to give him the greater power and influence.

They never pray to God without invoking an intercessor. A typical prayer in which Nikawng is invoked with God can be given.

"We praise you, you who are God. Protect us, we are in your hands, and protect us, save me. You and Nikawng you are the ones, who created, people are in your hands, and it is you Nikawng, who are accustomed to assist God to save, and it is you who give the rain. The sun is yours, and the sea (river) is yours, you who are Nikawng. You come from under the sun, you and your father, you two saved the earth, and your son Dak, you subdued all the peoples. The cow (for sacrifice) is here for you, and the blood will go to God and you. Now hear all of you, you the people of the earth, and save us. The person who rejects your talk will die."

This veneration of Nikawng may possibly be a bit of ancestor worship.

[p. 293]

28: Oyler M-5 (ca. 1918) 1918 FJ23 Shilluk FJ23



for they occasionally pray to their ancestors in the same way, and also to the dead chief of the village. The chief is looked upon as a father. Infrequently they pray to the spirit of some departed friend. When a person has a pleasant dream about a departed friend, a prayer is frequently addressed to his spirit, as he is well disposed. The mother, brothers and sisters may also be invoked.

When prayer is to be offered to the spirit of a dead person, a female sheep is brought to the grave. If the person making the prayer is not the son of the deceased, the right ear is cut from the sheep, and tied to the ankle of the person making the offering, and the wounded ear is washed in a gourd of water, so that the blood remains in the water, and then the water is poured on the grave, and part of it is thrown in the eye of the sun (that is thrown out in front of the sun). It is for God so that it will go to him. The sheep becomes the property of the heir of the deceased. The prayer is offered before the ear is cut off. If the sun offers, prayer is made to God and to the deceased, and then the sheep is killed as soon as the signs are right. The sheep is cut open, and the contents of the stomach and bowels are thrown on the house of the offerer, and then the meat is cooked. The meat can not be tasted until the oldest living wife of the deceased takes some of the soup in a small gourd, which is covered with a small native mat, and pours it on the grave. The soup that remains in the gourd is poured out in front of the house. The old men are then called to take the lead in eating the sacrifice. Women of all ages may eat of the sacrifice, but only the boys and old men of the males may eat, as no men of military age may eat of it. When the feast is finished the bones are carefully collected, and thrown into the river, as it would be bad if the bones of a devoted sheep should be gnawed by a dog.

While there is no set form for the prayer, and its length is determined by the sheep, yet they are all very similar, and the following is an example.

"We praise you, you, who are God, it was you, who gave me my father, who begat me. I pray to you also my father. Why did you go to the earth, and keep silence? Was not this your house before? When evil comes to your house, why do you not pray to God? Your house is given as a plaything to the people. You went to the presence of God, and we thought that nothing evil would befall us again, after you left. Now help.

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God. Why do you leave the responsibility of saving on God alone? God's spirit becomes tired (from work), and he leaves people, and they die. Why do you not see and save us? You went to the ground, and you have forgotten that a person from another house does not guard yours."

The prayer is continued in this strain until the sheep, responding to the necessity of nature, relieves itself, and that is taken as an omen that the prayer has been heard, and a favourable answer will be given. That which comes from the sheep is put on the grave. If the omen is delayed, the sheep may be taken to a house, and left there to be brought out another day. The prayer life among the Shilluks is developed by adversity, as they seldom if ever pray, when in prosperous circumstances.

Their veneration of Nikaang does not blind their eyes to his faults. When a prayer has been offered to Nikaang, and the answer is not given as had been hoped, the disappointed one curses Nikaang. That is true especially in the case of death. When death is approaching, they sacrifice to Nikaang and God, and pray that death may be averted. If the death occurs the bereaved one curse Nikaang, because he did not exert himself in their behalf. Apparently they do not pray to him that the condition of the deceased may be happy after death. He is sometimes spoken of as the son of God, but it is not definite, as they also use the same term in regard to his father, and one or two others.

They maintain that Nikaang still lives. He is even now watching over the Shilluks, and should he die the whole race would die, but in spite of their belief they have a sacred house for Nikaang, which is similar to the sacred houses in which the later kings have been buried. This fact weakens their statement that they believe that he still lives.

The departed leader comes back to his country on certain occasions. At night he can be heard in the sacred house, which has been dedicated to him. He sharpens his spear, or beats with his club, but when the attendants enter the house, no visible form is to be seen, but they know that the sounds were made by him. He may also ring a bell that is in the sacred house. When he is heard in the sacred house, the Shilluks say: "Nikaang walks in his country". They rejoice because it is an indication that he is actively watching over his people.

When the rains do not begin as soon as the natives think they should,

28: Oyler M-5 (ca. 1918) 1918 F323 Shilluk F323



the chief of the district offers a sacrifice to Nikaang so that the rains may come. After the prayer has been offered, and the rain comes, if it comes with a rushing sound they say that Nikaang walks in the storm, and the rushing sound is made by his passing.

Once the departed king returned so that he could be seen by the eye of man. The first kings did not die, but ascended. At last a time came when the kings were to be identified more fully with the people, and they were to be buried. The proper burial of the first king to receive that attention from his subjects, was of such great importance that Nikaang returned to give minute instructions as to how the king should be buried. Some say that he actually appeared in the flesh. Others say that he appeared to a certain old chief in a dream, and made known to him how one of his kingly descendants should be buried.

At certain times the old woman, who has charge of his sacred house places food in it for him. At the time of new moon the food is placed in his house, and may be offered to him one day, or four days. Very early in the morning the food is taken out, and eaten by the attendants. They say that Nikaang has tasted it. Should the offering entirely disappear in the night it would be taken as a serious omen. Milk is also placed in the house with the food. Should the old woman keeper of the sacred house dream of the king during the month, she places an offering of food in his house.

Similar offerings are made to the other kings, and also they may be made to an ancestor.

When the harvest is beginning, before the people may eat of their grain they must take an offering of their first fruits to Nikaang. After Nikaang has been given his taste of the first fruits the people may eat freely. An offering of the first fruits is also taken to each of the sacred houses of the other kings.

Many of them take an offering of the first fruits to the grave of an ancestor, usually the father. When offering to a father the grain is made into a sort of butter, and poured out on the grave. The man then says that he has given his father a taste. The worship at the family shrine dies out when the immediate family is all gone. In the case of the kings it is kept by all the people.

The power of Nikaang is upheld in some extent by a class of religious

29:Dempsey M-5 (1940-1954) 1955
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776 God is considered as being far off, aloof from mankind, caring nothing for the things He has created. Men do not
[782] then approach Him directly, nor, at least on great public occasions, presume to offer sacrifice to Him. Approach to God can only be made through the great mediator, Nyikang. It is Nyikang who, though he led his people into and left them in so sorry a plight, is reverenced as the Father and Saviour of the Shilluk people, is worshipped as a demi-
[775] god, and is thought of as always dwelling among them in
[782] the person of the reigning king. To him are all prayers
[778] made and sacrifices offered; in his honour sacred dances are performed. His numerous shrines, located in different parts
[793] of the country in which his spirit is believed to dwell, are carefully tended by the Bang Reth, to whom fall the perquisites of the meat of the sacrifices and the tributes of grain willingly surrendered from a meagre harvest in the sacred name of Nyikang.

776 The king, as the personification, as it were, of Nyikang
643 on earth, will offer the principal sacrifices on important
782 occasions during the year, for example, to obtain a plentiful
[789] rainfall and a bumper harvest, for the averting of the plague
[781] of weaver birds which descend on the country in their millions each year and devour the ripening grain, in times of drought and flood, of epidemic among the people and plague which is carrying off the cattle. On these and similar occasions is Nyikang invoked and sacrifice offered to him by
[634] the king himself and the district chiefs, and yet it is clearly understood by all that it is not Nyikang himself who will bestow the benefit or avert the disaster, but God, moved to clemency by the intercession of Nyikang for his people. And so the second and last article of the Shilluk Creed would run 'and in Nyikang, Son of God, Father of the Shilluk people, and our only intercessor with God for us'.

775 Alongside the cult of Nyikang, there is also a cult of the
769 dead. The Shilluk have only a vague notion of life after death in the Christian sense. They do, indeed, speak of the *Pa Juok*, God's country, which is the abode of Nyikang and their ancestors, and which is reached only after months of

29:Dempsey M-5 (1940-1954) 1955
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difficult and weary travel, but they are hazy as to what kind of life is led in that country and suppose it to be but a continuation of the kind of life they know on this earth. Meanwhile the spirits which have not yet started on the journey to Pa Jwok hover round their graves and former homesteads and may do harm to their living relations, and a person who has died in enmity with anyone is greatly to be feared by his late enemy. All these spirits, therefore, have to be placated by offerings and sacrifices. Someone may be taken ill, and the anxious relatives call in the witch doctor to tell them which spirit is responsible for bringing this evil upon them. He consults his oracle, such as an empty calabash to which he listens intently, and then informs the people that Nyikang says such-and-such a one, recently dead, is responsible and that sacrifice and prayer must be offered to his spirit, and perhaps intercession and sacrifice is to be made at the grave of the sick person's dead father, that his spirit may prevail upon the malignant one to remove the curse from his family. Accordingly a sheep is led to the grave of the person to be placated. The right ear is cut off and washed in water and the water poured over the grave. Prayer is made both to God, Jwok-Atang (on such private occasions as this without the intercession of Nyikang), and to the dead person. Then the sheep is killed and the meat cooked. Some of the soup is poured over the grave and the meat is then eaten by those who have taken part in the sacrifice.

All former kings, and in some cases great chiefs, have their shrines. These shrines consist of two or three huts built in the usual Shilluk fashion but with much better thatching than that affected by the ordinary Shilluk and enclosed within a reed or thorn fence. As befitting the great spirit that dwells within, these shrines are kept in good repair and spotlessly clean by the duly appointed guardians. One such shrine is situated just a few hundred yards from the mission at Detwok. It consists of two large huts surrounded by a fence and is dedicated to Nyala, a woman, surprisingly enough. She was the daughter of the seventeenth